

Corzine to introduce rail safety legislation

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WASHINGTON -- Sen. Jon Corzine, D-N.J., said Monday he will introduce legislation establishing federal guidelines on rail shipment of hazardous materials and chemicals following a recent train wreck in South Carolina that caused a chlorine gas leak, killing nine people.

The Jan. 6 chemical spill injured more than 200 and forced thousands of residents to be evacuated after a Norfolk Southern train slammed into a parked train, puncturing a tanker car carrying chlorine. A preliminary investigation determined the crew that parked a two-car train on a siding failed to reset the switch to the main track.

Corzine's legislation would establish federal guidelines on the physical condition of rail cars that transport hazardous materials and look into alternative routes for hazardous materials to avoid "high-risk areas" of the country. If no alternative route is available, the measure would require that local, state and federal authorities be notified so they can monitor the passage of the train.

The measure also calls for local, state and federal authorities to coordinate plans on how to respond to a terrorist attack on rail shipments of hazardous materials.

Corzine said his hope is to prevent a similar accident. More than half of the country's 60,000 pressurized rail tank cars do not meet industry standards, Corzine added.

Corzine introduced the Chemical Plant Security Act in 2001 and again in 2003 to establish security standards for chemical facilities. The Environmental Protection Agency said last year that there are 123 facilities in 24 states where a chemical release could expose more than 1 million people to highly toxic chemicals.

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